

San Diego's Best Places To Work

At the companies on our list, work isn't a four-letter word. Where to find the best pay, perks and people who love their jobs.

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BY JULIA BEESON

SIX MONTHS. That's how long ago our search for the region's best workplaces began. First, we had to get out the word about our survey to the 139,159 employers here. Then we had to determine the judging criteria. What makes a company a great place to work? We enlisted the help of the human-resources pros at Employers Group. To arrive at a company score, they looked at a broad range of factors that contribute to workplace satisfaction. They considered the obvious: How much does the gig pay? What's the retirement plan? But they also dug deeper to measure less-tangible attributes: How valued and appreciated do employees feel? Do their opinions count in the decision-making process? Is it a fun place to be?

We narrowed the list to 104 semifinalists, then asked a random sampling of workers at each company to complete an employee satisfaction survey. We combined the scores from the survey with the company score to determine the 10 best workplaces in three size categories.

The smallest company on our list employs 40 people; the largest, 10,000. From a tiny Internet start-up to a titanic healthcare provider, we found it takes a lot more than a fat paycheck and a 401(k) to make for a satisfied, productive employee. "We're seeing employers ratcheting up and offering more when it comes to compensating their employees," says Gary Moss, labor market information specialist with the San Diego Workforce Partnership. So if you're feeling uninspired and underpaid, read on. There are some great places to work in San Diego.

500 OR MORE EMPLOYEES

1. Scripps Health

Company description: A not-for-profit, community-based, healthcare-delivery network

Number of employees: 10,800

4275 Campus Point, San Diego 92121

800-SCRIPPS; scripps.org

Highlights: Flexible scheduling; wellness program; learning programs opportunities;

Six months after starting his job as an operating-room custodian at Scripps, Bruce Grendell was promoted to orderly. That was the beginning of a 20-year trajectory that has landed Grendell in a senior administrative position with the healthcare network, which includes five acute-care hospitals, more than 2,600 physicians, an extensive ambulatory network, home healthcare and associated support services.

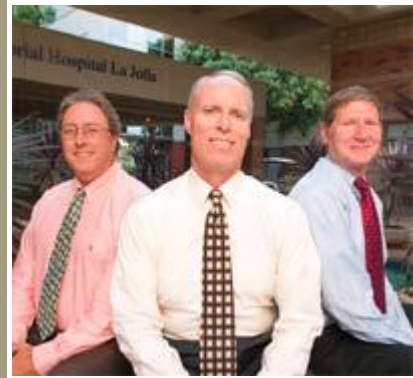
"One of the things I value most about Scripps is that I've been able to accomplish my personal and professional goals while working for the same employer," says Grendell, who was assisted by Scripps' tuition-reimbursement program when he returned to school to get his master's degree in nursing. Scripps let him keep his job when he left to work in a refugee camp in Thailand and volunteer as a relief worker in Uganda and Armenia. "None of these experiences would have been possible if it were not for the great relationship I had with my manager," Grendell says. "It all starts at the top. We have a multitude of inspirational leaders who show care and concern for the support and development of the people who provide care for our patients."



SURVEY SAYS: METHODOLOGY

EMPLOYERS GROUP developed two surveys to help determine San Diego's best workplaces. The first was an extensive questionnaire designed to measure company policies and practices in nine categories: work/ life balance; employee voice/workplace culture; community involvement; employee turnover; pay; benefits; perks/incentives; training/opportunity for advancement; and diversity. More than 300 companies filled out at least part of the 402-question survey. Employers Group used a blind-scoring system to total the scores of the initial survey. The 104 highest-scoring companies became semifinalists.

For the final round, Employers Group conducted a confidential employee satisfaction survey with a random sampling of workers at each semifinalist company. The sampling was based on company size; companies that did not complete at least 75 percent of the employee satisfaction surveys were disqualified. Using employees' answers to each of the 12 questions, a final employee-satisfaction score was determined. The company score and the employee-satisfaction score were weighted equally and combined to determine a final total score and ranking. Statistical ties were broken using the highest employee-satisfaction score.



One of those leaders is senior vice president Vic Buzachero. "We understand that our brand, what we do, is all about our people," he says. "We recognize the life cycle of each employee —whether they are early career, midcareer or late career—and help them grow within Scripps and find a career that fits their specific needs."

Buzachero and other senior management host 15 employee focus groups annually to keep a finger on the pulse of the Scripps workforce. "When you put the mosaic [of employee input] together, you create something that's beautiful —and that's something our patients also appreciate."

Dot Zekan is a client services helpdesk analyst who also has worked at Scripps for 20-plus years. "One of the best things about being employed at Scripps is that they 'walk the talk' when it comes to caring about the mental and physical well-being of their staff," she says. "We are encouraged to be fit, ambitious for the future, caring of our clients and coworkers, diverse in our interests, vested in our community and ethical in our work practices—to basically emulate what Scripps does best: heal those in need."

2. Loews Coronado Bay Resort

Company description: Luxury hotel

Number of employees: 532

4000 Coronado Bay Road, Coronado 92118

619-424-4000; loewshotels.com

Highlights: Free meals; community outreach program; Loews University training courses; opportunity for advancement; employee-recognition programs; discounts at hotel restaurants, spa and other Loews hotels

In an industry that has notoriously high turnover, Loews Coronado Bay Resort & Spa has a number of employees who have worked at the resort for more than 10 years. One reason the resort enjoys a low turnover rate is the tight-knit atmosphere promoted in the workplace.

"This business is run like a family," says human resources generalist Randa Hinojosa. "Every day when you leave for work, you leave one family to come to another. That comes from the top."

General manager Kathleen Cochran gets to know each of her employees personally. She attends funerals of employees' loved ones and celebrates the births of their children. "An emotional connection is really important," says Cochran, who also joins in the company book club. "When you treat employees with dignity and respect—as we'd treat our guests—they'll want to stay in their job."

Kimberly Dopulos plans on sticking around for a long time. She began her Loews career four years ago as a restaurant manager and has since worked her way up to department head. "From the start,

managers took the time to get to know me, helped me identify areas that I could develop and encouraged my personal growth,” she says. “They understand that it’s the people who make the business happen, so they cater to us and make sure we’re happy instead of worrying about the bottom line first.”

Dopulos is also co-director of the Good Neighbor Council, composed of resort employees who volunteer their time to various charitable causes in the community. The council also organizes educational and wellness programs, as well as team-building activities.

3. Palomar Pomerado Health

Company description: Largest public health network in the state offering comprehensive health services

Number of employees: 3,200 15255 Innovation Drive, San Diego 92128
800-628-2880; pph.org

Highlights: Pension plan is one of the best in Southern California (PPH contributes 6 percent with no employee contribution required; after 15 years, the contribution increases to 6.5 percent); generous personal time off (five and a half weeks per year for a normal five-day workweek); leadership development; Professional Enhancement Program that allows employees to receive annual bonuses of \$700-\$3,000.

When Michael Covert, president and CEO of Palomar Pomerado Health, first arrived on the scene in January 2003, the sense of employee disenfranchisement was palpable. The largest employer in inland North County, the healthcare provider was structured as a “classic parent-child organization,” says Covert, with minimal input from employees in any decision-making process. He set to work to reverse this dynamic, sitting in focus group after focus group and soliciting employee feedback to create the company’s new vision statement.

“My job very clearly is to work for them; it’s not the other way around,” says Covert, who maintains an open door policy, inviting employees to contact him directly with concerns. “We are communicative with our people, we listen to them, our goals are aligned, and we are accountable to them.”

In her two decades at Palomar Pomerado Health, Lorie Shoemaker has worked her way up to chief nursing executive. “PPH teamwork really does live and breathe,” she says. “The leadership is very collaborative and people feel valued and have a say in what happens.” Nurses make decisions related to their practice via councils.

PPH recently received a grant from private foundation The California Endowment to develop a program called CLAS, which stands for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services. “Diversity is very valued in our organization,” says Shoemaker. “We want to make sure we are providing culturally competent care and to speak to patients in a language they can understand. We want to be culturally sensitive to our employees as well.”

The company’s Professional Enhancement Program lets employees earn points, redeemable for cash bonuses, for community involvement, participation on committees and advanced education.

100-499 EMPLOYEES

1. Provide Commerce

Company description: E-commerce marketplace for perishable goods

Number of employees: 225
5005 Wateridge Vista Drive, San Diego 92121
858-729-2800; providecommerce.com

Highlights: Career growth opportunities; work/life programs (i.e., Pilates during working hours); 20 paid days per year of daycare for employees’ children; flexible schedules; discounts on all four of the company’s branded Web sites; bonuses.



When ProFlowers.com, one of the four Web sites operated by Provide Commerce, celebrated reaching \$150 million in revenue earlier this year, each employee received a lime-green iPod. It's one of countless examples of how CEO Bill Strauss marks every company milestone by rewarding employees. In just the past year, employees enjoyed a private room at Rock Bottom Brewery for the Rose Bowl football game, a Valentine's Day Survival Party, indoor kart racing at Miramar Speed Circuit, a Padres night, a holiday party, company picnic and a private screening of *King Kong* on opening night.

Then there was Employee Appreciation Week. It started with breakfast served by senior management, followed by a *Napoleon Dynamite* movie day with a pizza lunch. Employees were encouraged to wear costumes inspired by the movie, with a contest deciding the best get-up. A Ben & Jerry's ice cream truck pulled up the next day; disco bowling was Thursday. The week ended with a Happy Hour and the company's second annual Musical Chairs Invitational.

"We have a very special and exhilarating culture that we believe is a result of our entrepreneurial, Internet startup roots," says Penny Handscomb, vice president of human resources and training. "We credit our success to hiring great people—and once we get them, we take good care of them. It's a habit that breeds more success." And as one employee is quick to point out, credit is also due to a "very collaborative" management team, which "values the input of everyone."

The company ranked first in our survey for low employee turnover. They also top the list for community involvement: Recent beneficiaries include the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, San Diego Multiple Sclerosis Walk and Asian tsunami victims, among others. "Assistance to our community members is an extension of our relationship with our employees and our growing relationship within the community," says Handscomb.

ABOUT EMPLOYERS GROUP

The "San Diego's Best Places To Work" program was supported by a partnership between *San Diego Magazine* and Employers Group. Formed in 1896 under the name The Merchants & Manufacturer's Association, Employers Group is part of an elite set of organizations that have encouraged California's growth and prosperity for more than a century.

Intellectual capital has become more valuable for a company's success than its hard assets and muscle power. Employers Group has evolved with the times so its human-resource management services and products meet the needs of today's fast-paced, high-tech business arena. With five regional offices, and an expanded member services unit, Employers Group has partnered with hundreds of companies to maximize the human potential of their businesses. The company provides services, such as training, a motivating compensation package, a life/work balance program, risk-management guidance or simply the latest legislative and legal information at prices more competitive than most large consulting or law firms.

2. College Loan Corporation

Company description: Educational lender

Number of employees: 458

16855 West Bernardo Drive, Suite 100, San Diego 92127

888-972-6311; collegeloan.com

Highlights: Tuition reimbursement; healthcare coverage; bonus plans; generous 401(k) matching policy (up to 6 percent of employee contribution); flexible schedule for new parents; employee recognition programs

At College Loan Corporation, employees are just as valued as the 600,000 students they've helped pay for college (the company manages more than \$9 billion in student-loan assets). "My employees are my customers," says Rob La Breche, president of consumer marketing. "They can talk to us about anything, anytime. We work to establish the kind of culture in which people enjoy their jobs . . . if I create that environment, they'll want to treat their customers that way."

Our survey results give credence to La Breche's claim; the company tops the list for "employee voice" and "workplace culture" in their business-size category. In addition to management's open-door policy, employees express any concerns and opinions by completing annual surveys. They also tell

management how they want to be rewarded. A day at the Del Mar races, golf tournaments, a family fishing derby, a suite at Petco Park and quarterly parties are recent examples.

"We want our employees to grow and stay with us," says director of human resources Heather Brown. To advance that development, the company offers a tuition-reimbursement program and two-week training "boot camp."

Chris Rutherford was promoted to senior loan officer after taking advantage of such programs. "The training is ongoing and provides positive motivation," says Rutherford. "We're not stuck at the same level; there's satisfaction in always having the opportunity to grow in the company."

Another gratifying aspect to the corporate culture here is the varied charity work that goes on. "There's always a rally for helping one endeavor or another," says La Breche. The company donated \$100,000 to schools affected by Hurricane Katrina; they also give computers to area schools.

3. The Ken Blanchard Companies

Company description: Specialists in workplace learning, productivity, performance and leadership effectiveness solutions

Number of employees: 270

125 State Place, Escondido 92029

760-489-5005, 800-728-6000;

kenblanchard.com

Highlights: Profit sharing; training opportunities; infant-at-work program; employee-assistance program, which offers free counseling, legal and financial services; wellness program with access to fitness equipment; lifestyle seminars; Blanchard Gives Back program, which allows employees to direct money to charity

Through its training services and products, The Ken Blanchard Companies helps CEOs and other leaders create thriving, effective workplaces. And they have taken "practice what you preach" to new heights. The company offers its clients a powerful example of an engaged, productive and happy workforce. Central to the Ken Blanchard formula: education.

Says 13-year Ken Blanchard vet and western region sales director Mark Manning: "Our company has been working with leaders around the world to tap into the potential and power of their people. I've seen this modeled in our own company in many ways."

Employees can take the same courses that are offered to clients through the company's Intelligence Quest University, free of charge, and are reimbursed for any job-related training outside the office. The company awards employee scholarships to the Master of Science in Executive Leadership program at the University of San Diego, and employees and family members are eligible to receive a 60 percent tuition reduction when they pursue bachelor's or master's degrees through Grand Canyon University (which can be completed entirely on-line).

Another component integral to the company philosophy is community involvement. In June, Manning was part of a group of 50 Ken Blanchard employees to take part in Homes of Hope, a "life-changing experience" in which they built homes in Tijuana. "As vans shuttled us back across the border, we all realized how blessed we are and what it felt like to commit our energy toward something far more significant than ourselves," he says. "That is the power of working for and with this company; it's demonstrated not only in the halls of our headquarters but in the halls of our clients." In addition, the Blanchard Gives Back program has given nearly \$670,000 to charity.

99 OR FEWER EMPLOYEES

1. Proffer Financial

Company description: Home loan lender

Number of employees: 40

3636 Nobel Drive, Suite 410, San Diego 92122

858-453-5405, 600-984-0634;

profferfinancial.com

Highlights: 15-20 percent higher wages than industry norm, bonuses, casual environment, gym memberships, incentive program, less than 3 percent turnover

We kept hearing the same thing during our random survey of Proffer Financial employees: "I look forward to coming into work every day!" The enthusiasm was undeniable. Either someone is spiking the water cooler, or this is a seriously attractive place to work.

Operations manager Mark Madden says it's the latter. He's been with the company since its inception in 2003. "One of the founding thoughts was to promote a work/life balance," says Madden. "We work hard and play hard. We establish goals and set rewards the whole company can share in."

The top salespeople recently enjoyed a four-day vacation to Cabo San Lucas. Closer to home, colleagues get to know each other on a personal level during picnics at Mission Bay, Padres games, opening day at the Del Mar races, golf tournaments and Friday-afternoon Happy Hours. They're also encouraged to get involved in the community through the company's association with Big Brothers Big Sisters.

With 40 employees, Proffer Financial is the smallest business to make our Best Workplaces list. Clearly, smaller can be better. "The small-shop atmosphere and flat-line management structure makes you feel like . . . a genuine contributor to the company's overall success," says one employee.

The office environment also plays a part in promoting a collaborative, friendly atmosphere. You won't find a maze of cubicles or offices with closed doors; it's mostly open space.

"People walk into our office and go, 'Wow, what a great environment,' " says Madden. "It's the smiles on people's faces; there's a lot of interaction, and it's not a suit-and-tie kind of place . . . we're having fun."

2. Western Pump

Company description: Petroleum and lubrication equipment company

Number of employees: 50

3235 F Street, San Diego 92102

619-239-9988; westernpump.com

Highlights: Matched 401(k) (up to 6 percent); annual bonus; educational financial assistance; company vehicles; gas cards; cell phone

Many employers describe their workplace as an extended family, but Western Pump takes the claim literally. Owners Dennis and Jan Rethmeier enlisted the help of their two sons to transform a fledgling company into a \$9.3 million business. Their daughter later joined the crew to help manage operations. Strong family values imbue every aspect of the business.

"It all starts with the integrity of the owners and filters down throughout the company," says Dennis. With only 5 percent employee turnover, the company keeps its employees engaged and stimulated by promoting continued education. Its educational-assistance program finances formal training so employees stay up-to-speed on industry practices and codes. Each employee is sent to technical, safety-training and equipment-certification classes.

In his three years with the company, Dan Ristic has taken advantage of the extensive training, advancing to a project management role. "They give me ample opportunity to grow both personally and professionally," says Ristic.

"They take interest in me as a person and ask where I want to be in a year."

Employees are involved in the decision-making process, meeting one-on one with managers on a regular basis to discuss goals and progress. "We continuously conduct employee-satisfaction surveys to measure and understand our employees' morale, opinions and motivation," says Evrim Erdag, market research analyst. Out-of-office socializing is another perk—picnics, baby showers, birthday and anniversary parties, baseball games, golf tournaments and more.

"The core of the company's culture is the balance of work and personal lives—a balance between the seriousness of the company's mission and the fun we promote in the workplace," says Erdag.

3. Manpower of San Diego

Company description: Job placement and workforce solutions company Number of employees: 95 1855 1st Avenue, San Diego 92101 619-237-9900; manpower-sd.com Highlights: Paid time off; tuition reimbursement; discounted gym membership; Dieting for Dollars (annual contest with cash prizes for reaching fitness goals)

When Shana Diato unexpectedly lost her job six years ago, she took a receptionist position at Manpower's San Diego office. What began as a temporary solution evolved into a recruiting position and a fulfilling career path with unlimited potential. She's the archetype of both the Manpower employee and client.

"One of the messages we give to employers is that they need to give people a chance to prove themselves," says executive officer Phil Blair. "So that's one of the things we practice ourselves . . . we let people spread their wings and fly." Mother to a young son, Diato also points to the "family-oriented" nature of the company. "We know each other's families; Phil and [co-executive officer] Mel [Katz] give birthday cards to our kids and understand that sometimes kids get sick, so they're very accommodating bosses." Flexible scheduling is another major job perk for parents.

Volunteerism is a major component of the Manpower culture, and the San Diego office, one of 1,100 Manpower locations worldwide, supports a variety of charitable organizations, from the Urban League to the Red Cross. Ranking at the top of our survey for diversity, the company also makes an effort to employ a spectrum of people who reflect the community it serves.

The List: San Diego's Best Places To Work

500 OR MORE EMPLOYEES

1. Scripps Health

(10,800 employees)

A not-for-profit, community-based, healthcare delivery network that includes four acute-care hospitals on five campuses, more than 2,600 affiliated physicians, an extensive ambulatory care network, home healthcare and associated support services.

2. Loews Coronado Bay Resort & Spa (532)

Headquartered in New York City, Loews Hotels offers distinctive hotels in most major markets in the United States and Canada.

3. Palomar Pomerado Health (3,200)

The hospital district covers an 800- square mile area and is the largest hospital district in California.

4. Amylin Pharmaceuticals (717)

A biopharmaceutical company committed to improving lives through the discovery, development and commercialization of innovative medicines.

5. National University (2,000)

The second-largest private, nonprofit university in California.

6. Wal-Mart Stores (5,762 in San Diego; 1.8 million worldwide)

The world's largest retailer, with \$312.4 billion in sales.

7. Watkins Manufacturing Corporation (1,100)

Maker of Hot Spring Spas, the number one selling brand of portable spa, and Caldera Spas

8. VA San Diego Healthcare System (2,466)

Provider of comprehensive healthcare for inpatients and outpatients at the medical center in La Jolla and outpatient care at clinics around the county.

9. City of Carlsbad (1,100)

Strives to continue to improve the quality of life for all those who live, work and play in Carlsbad.

10. American Specialty Health (540)

A diversified specialty benefits company for physical medicine, complementary healthcare, wellness and disease management for obesity.

BETWEEN 100 AND 499 EMPLOYEES

1. Provide Commerce (225 employees)

Manages a collection of branded Web sites, each offering high-quality, perishable products.

2. College Loan Corporation (458)

Student-loan provider, managing more than \$9 billion in student-loan assets.

3. The Ken Blanchard Companies (270)

Consulting firm that helps companies improve their performance, productivity and bottom-line results.

4. Seacrest Village Retirement Communities (230)

Retirement communities providing services to seniors in a Jewish environment.

5. Road Runner Sports (302)

Running apparel, shoes, accessories and information resource.

6. Reef (105)

One of the largest sandal manufacturers in the world, now evolved into a full fledged apparel brand.

7. WebSide Story (142)

A leading provider of on-demand digital marketing applications.

8. Gordon & Rees, LLP (170)

Founded in 1974 in San Francisco, Gordon & Rees employs more than 290 attorneys in 11 offices.

9. Dudek (200)

A leading Southern California engineering and environmental firm that solves regulatory and technical challenges for municipal agencies and major landowners.

10. Planned Parenthood of San Diego & Riverside Counties

Provides confidential, comprehensive, high-quality medical services.

FEWER THAN 99 EMPLOYEES

1. Proffer Financial (40 employees)

A mortgage professional dedicated in providing expert guidance through Internet technology with the added convenience of local service.

2. Western Pump (50)

The only fully integrated petroleum and lubrication systems firm in California. Specializes in

construction and servicing of fleet fueling facilities, aviation, retail service stations and convenience stores.

3. Manpower of San Diego (95)

A staffing agency that offers employers a range of services such as permanent, temporary and contract recruitment; employee assessment and selection; training; outplacement; outsourcing; and consulting.

4. Olivenhain Municipal Water District (84)

A water management company, committed in serving safe, reliable, high-quality water in a cost-effective and environmentally sensitive manner.

5. Althea Technologies (93)

Founded in 1998, a biotechnology pharmaceutical company with expertise in qPCR assay services and plasmid DNA production.

6. NAMM, the International Music Products Association (64)

An international association representing nearly 9,000 retailers and manufacturers of musical instruments. Its mission is intended to unify, lead and strengthen the global music products industry.

7. Epsilon Systems Solutions (100)

A private, veteran-owned small business providing innovative technical and operational solutions such as environmental management services and marine field services.

8. MortgageIT (74)

A mortgage lender, providing retail, wholesale and correspondent lending products and services.

9. Peartrees Catering (70)

Established in 1984 and now one of the largest, state-of-the-art catering facilities in San Diego County.

10. Apical Industries (75)

Apical is a provider of quality emergency flotation and evacuation equipment.